CHAPTER III

3.1 Legislative Role of the Legislators –

Working of the Legislature:

Every country and every legislature has its own problems and priorities to be decided according to the needs of time and the prevalent social, economic, ethical, religious, political and other factors. As the legislative bodies are the mirror of the wishes and aspiration, wants and grievances, remedies and rectifications, and the problems of their people, the procedures adopted and followed by them are significant.

Legislative institutions acquired serious attention of the social scientists, particularly of the political scientists in the recent past, as they constitute the integral part of the representative form of the Government. Political scientists carried out research on three aspects of the legislature, viz., description of its structure and functions, explaining the developmental activities and analysing the behaviour of the

members. However, the perplexing questions on the theme of legislative chambers continued.

Long back when legislative institutions were slowly taking shape James Bryce got alarmed of the decline of the legislature. He went further to analyse the reasons for the decline and observed that the decline was due to the denomination of the executive over the legislature. Later a major concern in the inquiry was whether the legislative institutions could make any significant impact on the policies and decisions of the Government. K C Wheare, an exponent of legislative research opened a chapter in his book 'Legislature' and later authenticated that the legislatures declined not in power but in efficiency.

The genuine apprehension over the functioning of the parliamentary institutions has been echoed many times in history since the representative form of Government came

2. ibid, p2.
into operation. Crises had cropped up in the functioning of the parliamentary institutions in Western Europe in various periods since the First World War. There were ebbs and flows in the functioning of the legislatures\(^6\). Political scientists primarily concentrated on this emerging area of legislative research. As such systematic efforts were carried out by various agencies and institutions at national and international levels in order to focus on certain areas such as (a) role of the legislative assemblies in the department of political system, (b) performance of the assemblies and their role in socio-economic development of the societies, (c) structure of the legislative institutions, (d) legislator’s socialization, (e) ethics and legislative performance, (f) legislative leadership and the like.

As such the legislature and legislative behaviour had drawn serious attention of the political scientists over the years. The lamentation of the politicians and the social scientists about the behaviour of the legislators and the

consequences thereof in the parliamentary bodies created a lurking fear that parliamentary democracy might eclipse. Since role orientation was one of the most influential factors in determining the behaviour, an attempt had been made to study the role of the legislators from broader perspectives.

Every member of a legislature is expected to perform a number of roles both within and outside the assembly, which may even sometimes contradict and come into clash with each other. Besides participating in the decision making and policy making process, a legislator has to attend to a number of duties relating to his constituencies, party members, interest group and the like. Normally legislators consider that it is their moral responsibility to take the grievances of their constituents to the authoritative forum like the legislature and other concerned institutions to redress them. Thus a legislator has to work as a representative, a liaison officer, a reflector, a messenger and

a servant\textsuperscript{8}, in a sense that it provides better insight to understand their legislative behaviour, particularly political culture. In modern legislature, a legislator has to perform multiple roles while responding to the needs and demands of the people.

The working of the legislature is largely determined by the role and behaviour of the legislators. As such a survey of the working of the legislature helps in proper understanding of the role of the legislators. Furthermore the role and behaviour are so inseparably intermingled that the behaviour sometimes determines the role and vice-versa. Therefore, legislators role and behaviour have been subjected to numerous empirical research. Thus legislative research has come to embrace not merely the structure, methods and techniques of the legislature, but also the legislative behaviour.

Legislative role of the legislator is inseparably intermingled with his/her legislative behaviour. Research on

\textsuperscript{8} Misra, Dip Narayan, Legislature and Indian Democracy, Concept Publishing Co, Delhi, pp 136.
contemporary legislative behaviour focuses primarily on the nature of legislative role. As such the working of the legislature provides opportunity to look into the legislative role of the legislators.

In every country where parliamentary democracy exists, appropriate machinery has been provided whereby members secure information from the ministers on various aspects of administration and policy by putting questions and interpellations. There is a difference between interpellation and question. An interpellation is a request made through the presiding officer of the House to a Minister by a private member for an oral explanation on certain matter for which the minister is responsible, although there are limits on the length of speeches. No provision is made for interpellation in the British Parliament. While in case of questions, debate is rarely allowed to lead to a vote.

The first hour of every sitting of the Legislative Assembly, excepting on Saturday, is the Question Hour.

Rule 30, of Assam Legislative Assembly says unless the Speaker otherwise directs, the first hour of every sitting shall be available for the asking and answering of questions\footnote{Rule 30 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in ALA.}. Questions put to the ministers play a very important role in the proceeding of the Assembly. The question hour in our legislature has developed all the characteristic features of its counterpart in the House of Commons\footnote{Jha, Dayadhar, State Legislature in India, Legislature in the Indian Political System, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, pp 219.}.

The question hour provides an excellent opportunity for a fair discussion and criticism of the Government policy both in principles and practices. The hour makes the business of the Assembly lively and interesting and put treasury benches on nerve straining tests and provides opportunities for debates on the working of the executive\footnote{Sanjay- Development of Legislature in Arunachal Pradesh- A Study of Institutional and Political Behaviour, Ph. D. Thesis submitted to Gauhati University, 1989.}.

Question hour is a major opportunity for the back benchers to claim the attention of the House as well as to obtain publicity. It is a deadly weapon before which even the
dictators quailed. Any member who distinguishes himself at the question hour attracts the attention of the House.

In fact, question hour can be compared to a game of chess. The chess players are the members of the House on the one side and the ministers concerned on the other. But the game of chess of ten ends in draw but in the game of questioning the minister is usually the winner because he has a number of advisers to tell him what he should speak and what he should not.

Question time may be regarded as a search light turned on the activities of the Government. It is a valuable instrument through which ministers can focus on what is happening in the country and the society.

Rule 37 provides for certain conditions of admissibility of the questions. Before putting a question and supplementary questions members have to observe the rules relating to question hour.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Rule 38, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Assam Legislative Assembly, p-25.
Categories of Questions: There are three types of questions: starred, Unstarred and short notice questions.

(a) Starred Questions: Rule 33 says that when a member wants a question to be answered orally, he indicates it by an asterisk mark or star while giving notice. A member can have only five questions for oral answers on a day's list. When the Starred questions are replied, the members who put the questions must be present. If he is not present no answer is given and no supplementaries can be put. The Speaker may call again any question which has not been asked due to the absence of the members in whose name it stands. While answering Starred Questions, no reference to the answers of Unstarred Questions could be made. A Starred Question can not lapse if the Minister-in-charge is not present in his

---


seat. Replies to Starred Questions which are not answered lapse after the session.

(b) Unstarred Questions: If a question is not distinguished by an asterisk, or if a question placed on the list of questions for oral answers on any day is not called for answers within the time available for answering questions on that day, a written answer to such questions shall be deemed to have laid on the table at the end of the question hour as soon as the questions for oral answers have been disposed of. Unstarred Questions are not put formally.16

(c) Short-Notice Questions: Rules 48(1) says that a question relating to a matter of public importance may be asked with notice shorter than 15 days and if the Speaker is of the opinion that the question is of an urgent nature, he may fix, in consultation with the ministers concern, a day for the reply to such a question. Such questions will be called immediately

after Starred Questions listed for the day have been disposed of\textsuperscript{17}.

(d) **Supplementaries**: When a reply has been given members can ask supplementary questions for the purpose of further elucidation. The Speaker may disallow any supplementary question if in his opinion it infringes the rules regarding questions\textsuperscript{18}. A question, which has already been answered, cannot be put as a supplementary question.

(e) **Half-an-Hour Discussion**: The Speaker can allot half-an hour or such time as he deems fit for raising discussion on a matter of sufficient public importance which has been the subject of a recent question, oral or written and which needs elucidation\textsuperscript{19}. Generally half-an hour discussion is an exception to the rule. The member who gives notice starts the discussion by making a short statement. Other member may participate in the discussion with the previous

\textsuperscript{17} Rule 48(2), Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Legislative Assembly, p-29.

\textsuperscript{18} Rule 34(2), Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Legislative Assembly, p-21.

\textsuperscript{19} Rule 49(1), Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Legislative Assembly, p-31.
permission of the speaker. There is no voting at the end of the discussion\textsuperscript{20}.

If a member who has given notice, in the absence of the other members who supported the notice, may, with the permission of the speaker, initiate the discussion.

Question Hour is a great safety valve and a safeguard against the abuses and make sure that Government departments can not get very far out of line, without being pulled up\textsuperscript{21}. Questions reflect public opinion for which the ministers at times may feel very sensitive. It does not mean that all the questions are equally important or serve as indicators of public opinion. It is through the question hour that the Government is able to feel the pulse of the people and adopt its policies and actions accordingly.

The Assam Legislative Assembly had been on record for making the question hour a very lively part of parliamentary democracy. The members of Assam

\textsuperscript{20} Rule 49(5) Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Legislative Assembly, p-32.
\textsuperscript{21} Chawla, M. C., "Question Hour in Parliament", in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Loksabha: Secretariat, 1967, p 66.
Legislative Assembly had been making extensive use of questions. We present below a table showing the number of questions asked in various sessions of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly.

The 8th Assam Legislative Assembly had 212 sittings extending up to twelve sessions to its credit. Thousands of questions were asked and answered in the different sessions of the Assembly. All the four types of questions – Starred, Unstarred, Short Notice and Supplementaries – were asked in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly. However, the number of Starred questions admitted and answered was more than the after three categories. This shows that the interest of the members was mainly on the Starred questions, as the members wanted to have oral answers to their questions. It gives them opportunity to put supplementaries.

The questions put by the members covered a wide range of subjects and the purpose of asking questions was as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>Working Days</th>
<th>Starred Questions asked</th>
<th>Answered/Admitted</th>
<th>Unstarred Questions asked</th>
<th>Answered/Admitted</th>
<th>SNQ Answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>212</strong></td>
<td><strong>3231</strong></td>
<td><strong>2549</strong></td>
<td><strong>2248</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>102</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SNQ: Short Notice Question

Source: Prepared on the basis of proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly debates. (1985-1990)

There were certain restrictions which the members had to bear in mind while tabling questions. A question, to be admissible, had to fulfil a number of conditions, viz.

1. It must not bring any name or statement, not strictly required to make the question intelligible.
(2) If it contains a statement by the members himself, the member asking it must make sure that he is responsible for the accuracy of the statement.

(3) It must not contain arguments, inferences, ironical or offensive expression, imputation, epithets or defamatory statements.

(4) It must not ask for an expression of opinion or the solution of a hypothetical proposition.

(5) It must not refer to the character or conduct of any person except for his official or public capacity.

(6) It must not be of excessive length.

(7) It shall not repeat in the same session in substance, Questions already answered or to which an answer has been refused, need not be repeated.

(8) It shall not require information set-forth in easily available documents or in ordinary works of reference.
(9) It shall not ask for information on a matter which is subjudice in a Court of Law having jurisdiction in any part of India.

(10) It shall not ordinarily ask about the matters pending before any statutory tribunal or statutory authority performing any judicial or quasi-judicial functions or any commission or court of enquiry appointed to enquire into, or investigate any matter. However, it may refer to matters concerned with the Procedure or Subject or stage of enquiry if it is not likely to prejudice the consideration of the matter by the Tribunal or Commission or Court of enquiry.

(11) It shall not reflect on the character or conduct of any person whose conduct can only be challenged on a substantive motion.

(12) It shall not make or imply a charge or personal character.

(13) It shall not ask for information on trivial, vague and meaningless matters.
(14) It shall not ask for information on matters of past history.

(15) It shall not relate to a matter with which a Minister is not officially connected.

(16) It shall not relate to day-to-day administration of local bodies or other semi-autonomous bodies. The Speaker may, however, allow questions which arise out of their relation with the Government or refer to breaches of law or rules or relate to important matters involving general welfare.

(17) It shall not refer to the debates in the current session.

(18) It shall not criticise decisions of the House of the State legislature.

(19) It shall not seek information about matters, which in their nature are secret, such as, decisions or proceedings of the Cabinet, advice given to the Governor by the law officers and such other subjects,
the disclosure of which could be against public interest.

(20) It shall not deal with the matters before a Committee appointed by the House or with the matters within the jurisdiction of the Chairman of a Select Committee or the authorities of the House.

(21) It shall not refer discourteously to a friendly foreign country.

(22) It shall not raise questions of policy too large to be dealt within the limits of an answer to a question.

(23) In matters which are or have been the subject of controversy between the Union Government and the State Government, no question could be asked except for the matters of fact, and the answer shall be confined to statement of facts.

**Speaker to decide admissibility:**

1. The Speaker decides whether a question, or a part thereof, is or is not admissible under the rules. He may disallow any question which, or a part thereof, which
in his opinion, has been an abuse on the right of questioning or is calculated to obstruct or prejudicially effect the procedure of the House or is in contravention of the rules.

2. Subjects to the provisions of rule 34(3), the Speaker may direct that a question be placed on the list of questions for answer on a date later than that specified by a member in his notice, if he is of the opinion that a longer period is necessary to decide whether the question is or is not admissible. The Speaker decides if a question is to be treated as Starred or Unstarred:

1. If in the opinion of the Speaker any question put down for oral answer is of such a nature that written reply would be more appropriate, the Speaker may direct that the question be placed on the list of questions for written answer. Provided that the Speaker may, if he thinks fit, call upon the member who has given notice of a question for oral answer to state in brief his reasons for desiring an oral answer
and, after considering the same, may direct that the question be included in the list of questions for written answer.

**The Purpose of Questioning:** The question time turns a search light upon every corner of public life, although the same has become too extensive for the search light to throw anything more than a diffused light. The questions seem to be effective for smaller issues. However, they are not really exact indication of opinion and interests of the House concerning the big issues. Any big issue of public policy creates a backwash in question time. The number of questions asked about them seem unlikely to be a fair measure of the feeling of the House. However, the question hour touching on all subjects under the run becomes a microcosm of the sitting\(^{22}\).

The question Hour serves several purposes. It compels the department to be circumspective in the discharge of their responsibilities. It induces officers to pay attention to individual grievances. It prevents petty injustices. It is

through the question hour that the Government becomes able to feel the pulse of the people and adopt policies and actions accordingly. The Opposition members seem to have special knack of asking questions. They were prominent in their party as well as in the House and were fully conscious of their responsibilities. The following table gives a clear picture:

Table:-3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>No. Of SQ put</th>
<th>No. Of USQ put</th>
<th>No. Of SNQ put</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3231</td>
<td>2804</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source :- Assam Legislative Assembly Debates (1985-1990)
A study of the questions of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly shows that the members had been able to ventilate the grievances of the people and through their persistent efforts forced the Government to assure the House that grievances would be redressed. The questions put by the members covered a wide range of subjects and the purpose of the questioning was evident from some of the examples enumerated below.

Asking of questions was by no means confined to the members of the Opposition in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly, but was also extensively used by the supporters of the Government. Most of the members of the ruling party sometimes attacked the minister concerned by criticising the Government policy. By and large, most of the questions were put by the members of the opposition.

The members seemed to be interested in putting Starred Questions, since they gave them scope to put maximum number of supplementaries. Unstarred Questions were also asked in larger number which covered various
interests or issues concerning the people. However, a declining trend was noticeable towards Short Notice Questions.

Although majority of the members put questions in Assamese, some of the members used English. Opposition members like A F Golam Osmani (UMF), Ardhendu Kr. Dey (UMF), Amrit Lal Basumatary of Cong(s), Sarat Ch. Sinha of Cong(s), Golok Rajbongshi, INC(I), Binay Khungur Basumatary, (UTNLF) predominantly used English language in the House. However, the members of the ruling party preferred to use Assamese language. Few members like Shiv Shambhu Ojah, INC(I), Kumari Rabi Das, INC(I) used Hindi in the deliberation of the House. While a few members like Ramendra Dey, CPI(M), Maziruddin Ahmed (UMF), A F Golam Osmani (UMF), used Bengali language. As such the functioning of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly represented the plural structure of the society of Assam.
Questions were sometimes put to secure information on a particular issue or Government policy. For example, Mosiruddin Sheikh INC(I) put a Starred Question to know from the minister concerned regarding the detection and deportation of foreigners in Assam. The Minister could not reply the question because of non-availability of information\textsuperscript{23}. A K Dey (UMF) put a similar question which the minister could not reply\textsuperscript{24}. Such questions were sometimes asked as a routine matter so as to secure some kind of information. For example, Shanti Ranjan Das Gupta (UMF) put a Starred Question to know from the Government regarding the eviction of the scheduled caste population in Abhayapuri and about the measures taken by the Government to rehabilitate them\textsuperscript{25}. Mithius Tudu INC(I) put a Starred Question demanding information from the Government regarding the amount allotted for Gossaigaon and Kachugaon for the improvement of a few existing roads,

\textsuperscript{23} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 247, dt. 28\textsuperscript{th} March, 1988, p-35.  
\textsuperscript{24} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 124, pp 35, dt. 14\textsuperscript{th} Nov, 1988.  
\textsuperscript{25} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 14, SQ 89, dt. 13\textsuperscript{th} Oct, 1987.
new roads and flood damage repair\textsuperscript{26}. Dalim Rai (AGP) put a Starred Question seeking information from the Government regarding the conditions of Women Hostel at Dighalbari under Golokganj constituency\textsuperscript{27}.

Demanding information on such a variety of issues was a routine exercise. On such questions supplementary questions were put to make Government's stand clear. Most of such questions were relating to the matters of the respective constituencies of the members.

Sometimes, questions were put to draw the attention of the Government to the questionable activities. Suren Swargiary (AGP) put a Starred Question to draw the attention of the House regarding the reply of the irrigation minister for an irrigation project in his home constituency. The member expressed dissatisfaction over the reply of the minister concerned involving huge amount of funds\textsuperscript{28}. Yusuf Ali Ahmed (UMF) put a Unstarred Question to know from the Government whether it was aware of the incident in which

\textsuperscript{26} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 16, dt. 20\textsuperscript{th} Nov, 1988.
\textsuperscript{27} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 362, dt. 27\textsuperscript{th} March, 1987, p 3-5.
\textsuperscript{28} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 362, dt. 27\textsuperscript{th} March, 1987, p 3-5.
people died of starvation in Bilashipara circle\textsuperscript{29}. Deba Kr. Bora (AGP) put a Starred Question demanding transparency regarding the transfer of teachers in which there was strong allegation of serious malpractices\textsuperscript{30}. Silvius Condopan, INC (I) asked a Starred Question to know from the Government about the measures taken to prevent erosion caused by devastating floods. Several supplementary questions were put by the members of different parties to expose inefficiency of the Government\textsuperscript{31}. Abdul M Choudhury, INC (I) seriously criticised the Government regarding the anomalies and malpractice that prevailed in the Silchar Medical College, Assam. Since such questions were of routine type, no supplementaries were put.

Questions were put, sometimes, in order to get information about nepotism or favouritism or corruption of a minister or the Government. Ganesh Kutum (AGP) put a Starred Question demanding clarification in regard to corrupt

\textsuperscript{29} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ, 1149, pp 76, dt. 10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1988

\textsuperscript{30} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 16 dt. 29\textsuperscript{th} March, 1988.

\textsuperscript{31} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 39, dt. 21\textsuperscript{st} April, 1988.
and unfair means adopted during admission in the MBBS course in the Medical Colleges of Assam against reserved quotas. Dinabandhu Choudhury (AGP) put a Short Notice Questions focussing on the corruption and irregularities in the Khadi and Gramodyog Board, Assam in matters of appointment. Serious charges of corruption were brought before the House over the answer of the Municipal Administration minister. The issue was raised before the House regarding alleged commission paid to Dispur, which generated heated exchange of words and uproar in the House. Dinabandhu Choudhury, (AGP) put a deferred Starred Question focussing on the alleged involvement of the minister in the purchase of land by HouseFed at Paschim Boragaon in Jalukbari Mouza. The member wanted to know from the minister as to who initiated the negotiation and talks with the land owner from whom the land had been purchased. The member demanded a valuation certificate to be presented before the House. The member expressed

32 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 39, dt. 21st April, 1988.
33 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 32, dt. 18th Nov, 1988.
34 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 6, dt. 24th April, 1989.
dissatisfaction over the reply of the minister on that issue and further wanted to know whether the deed of agreement was duly registered or not. The reply of the minister could not convince the members who participated in the debate.

Questions were put to attack departments of the Government for alleged malpractices. For instance, Muktar Hussain (UMF) put a Unstarred Question alleging malpractices in connection with purchase of materials of the irrigation department of Silchar Division. Ramendra Dey (CPI-M) drew the attention of the Government by putting a Starred Question demanded enquiry into the alleged irregularities and malpractice in the PWD Karimganj Division. The minister admitted malpractices in the department and assured the member to look into the matter in future. Maziruddin Ahmed (UMF), put a Starred Question regarding the erection of Pokalagi Hah Choraibari Bund in which materials supplied for use were rejected by the department due to their sub-standard quality. The

---

35 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 1, dt. 23rd March, 1990.  
37 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 37 dt. 27th April, 1988.
member demanded inquiry through independent agency. 
Dinabandhu Choudhury (AGP) focussed on the alleged 
malpractices of the provident fund commissioner regarding 
withdrawal of money.

Members mostly, put questions to place people’s 
demands, since the state legislature is the apex law making 
body in a state. Amrit Lal Basumatary, Cong.(S) proposed a 
private members resolution in the House that the people 
rendered homeless and landless by the devastating flood 
should be allotted land on priority basis as their of 
livelihood. Shahidul Islam (UMF) drew the attention of the 
Government to the recurring problem of power crisis in 
Dhing constituency. Naren Tanti (AGP) put an Unstarred 
Question to focus on the human rights of the children living 
in different orphanage of Guwahati. The member wanted to 
know the quality of food provided for them and whether

38 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 43, dt. 21st April, 1988. 
40 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 78, dt. 1st April, 1986. 
41 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 13, dt. 8th April, 1988.
those were nutritional or not\textsuperscript{42}. Abdul Jabbar (UMF) demanded immediate steps to be taken for the people severely affected by flood erosion\textsuperscript{43}. Through such questions demands were placed before the Government. Thus public grievances had been the live subjects on which a variety of questions were put in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

Questions were put to explore the activities of the departments. For example, Kusumbar Gogoi (AGP) put a Short Notice Question regarding the construction of Bridge over Buridihing river by Oil India Limited. The member wanted to know from the minister certain information, regarding the overhead pipeline crossing and non-transportation. The minister’s reply was unconvincing to the members\textsuperscript{44}. Golok Rajbongshi INC(I) focussed on the failure of the rural electrification due to its inefficiency\textsuperscript{45}. Dr. Kamala Kalita (AGP) raised a serious matter in the House regarding the death of a baby at the MMC Hospital,

\textsuperscript{42} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 40, dt. 17\textsuperscript{th} March, 1989.
\textsuperscript{43} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 310 dt. 8\textsuperscript{th} April, 1988, p 17-18.
\textsuperscript{44} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp23, dt. 11\textsuperscript{th} May, 1988.
\textsuperscript{45} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp23, dt. 11\textsuperscript{th} May, 1988.
Guwahati, in which an innocent doctor was suspended from duty instead of bringing the culprit to book. While the report of the committee was alleged to be biased, the member demanded fresh inquiry into the incident\textsuperscript{46}.

Supplementary Question had been an effective parliamentary device either to cross examine a minister or to harass or embarrass him. A member could put a supplementary Question on the verbal answer to a Short Notice Question or a written answer to a Starred Question for the purpose of further elucidation of facts regarding which such answer had been given, provided that\textsuperscript{47}:

(a) No discussion had been permitted during the time for questions under rule 32 in respect of any question or of any answer given to a question.

(b) Any member when called by the Speaker could ask a supplementary question for the

\textsuperscript{46} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 38, dt. 16\textsuperscript{th} May 1989.
purpose of further elucidating a point regarding which an answer had been given.

(c) The Speaker could disallow any supplementary question, if, in his opinion, it violated the rules regarding the question.

Extensive use had been made by the members of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly. At times more than 15 supplementary questions had been asked on a single question. Putting of supplementaries was not merely confined to the members of the opposition, but the ruling party members too vigorously attacked the minister by supporting the supplementaries. For example, Gunin Hazarika (AGP) put a Starred Question demanding information from the minister concerned regarding the result of a laboratory report on adulterated food. As the minister's reply did not satisfy the members, ten consecutive supplementaries were put to embarrass the minister. Eleven supplementaries were put over the reply of the education

---

minister in the House in response to a Starred Question put by Gopi Das (UMF) regarding the alleged irregularities in the appointment of teachers in Primary Schools. The minister admitted such irregularities. The reply of the minister in response to a Starred Question put by Debeswar Bora (AGP) on the matter of profit and loss of Dergaon Sugar Industry, witnessed uproar in the House. Members from both the ruling and the Opposition parties, participated actively in the debates and as many as ten supplementaries were put to criticise the Government policy. Consecutively eleven supplementaries were put over the reply of a minister in response to a Starred Question put by Phani Bhusan Choudhury, (AGP), to criticise the inefficiency of the department of Rural Electrification. At least ten supplementaries were put in response to the reply of the minister concern regarding the tea plantation in Doomdooma revenue circle. The matter could draw the attention of the

49 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 2, dt. 27th March, 1990.
51 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, p 8, dt. 5th May, 1989.
Dilip Kr. Saikia (AGP) wanted to know from the flood minister whether the Government had taken any master plan to check flood in Assam. The member expressed resentment over the failure of the flood control department to check floods. Members from both the ruling and the Opposition parties put ten supplementary questions to explore the departmental and the minister’s role in controlling flood in Assam.

Members, sometimes, put questions to reveal certain social evils. Abdul M Choudhury INC(I) drew the attention of the Government on the matter of sale of liquor and its impact on the civil society. Dr. Ardhendu Kr. Dey (UMF) put a Short Notice Question focussing on how drug addiction had become a challenge to the society. Padma Nath Kairi (IND) put a Starred Question to know from the minister concerned as to which districts in Assam had been identified as dry area and what measure were taken to prohibit the

---

52 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 145, dt. 28th March, 1988, p 5-7.
54 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 607 dt. 19th April, 1988, p 28-29.
55 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SNQ 36, dt. 10th May, 1988, p 31-33.
consumption of liquor. It seemed that the members had interest in reforming the society.

At times, members were found to show interest in the problems of the constituency other than their own. For instance, Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF) put an Unstarred Question highlighting various problems faced by the people of Barpeta District. Gopi Das (UMF) highlighted the irregularities in the supply of deep tube well in the Chenga constituency. Ganesh Boro (PTCA) wanted to know from the minister concern as to why the posts of teachers in the Bodo medium school had not been sanctioned especially in the provincialized Nikashi ME School.

Questions were put to make the proceedings lively. For instance, Silvius Condopan, INC(I) put a Starred Question to know about the drought relief under the NREP and the RLEGP schemes for the people who were extremely

---

56 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 19, dt. 5th April, 1990.
57 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 937, pp 42 dt. 2nd May, 1988.
58 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 243, pp 39, dt. 3rd April, 1989.
hit by drought. The matter drew the attention of the members irrespective of political ideology or party affiliation\textsuperscript{60}. The member argued that the reply of the minister was not convincing. Participating in the debate Joinath Sarma (AGP) wanted to know from the minister why the equal amount of money was not sanctioned in Sipajhar constituency under the NREP scheme. Several members rose to speak resulting in uproar in the House and the Speaker did not allow any member to speak on that further issue\textsuperscript{61}. Similarly, Debeswar Bora (AGP) put a Starred Question to know about the Land Policy of the Government. He further wanted to know whether such policies had benefited the tribal and the tea labourers in Assam or not. Members like Bharat Ch. Narah (AGP), Balabhadra Tamuly (AGP), Dilip Saikia Sonowal (AGP), Naren Tanti (AGP), Abdul M Choudhury, INC(I), Binoy Khungur Basumatary (UTNLF), Hemen Das (CPI-M) put supplementaries relating to land policy. The members appealed to the Government to adopt proper land policy to

\textsuperscript{60} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 207, dt. 31\textsuperscript{st} March, 1988, p 11-12.
\textsuperscript{61} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 12-14, dt. 31\textsuperscript{st} March, 1988.
benefit the landless people in Assam. The minister, however admitted that most of the people had not been granted patta. Ardhendu Kr. Dey (UMF) drew the attention of the Government to a news item published in the ‘Dainik Asom’, a news paper regarding the strike resorted to by the retired teachers. The minister assured the member that all necessary steps would be taken to solve the problems. Sometimes it was found out that although a question was not important, through supplementaries the same was made important and interesting. In fact, supplementaries were sometimes put to make the proceedings lively.

Sometimes, members, put questions which seemed to be unnecessary, irrelevant or vexatious. For example, Dalim Rai (AGP) put an Unstarred Question regarding the theft of cattle from the residence of VDP secretary by BSF jawans. Similarly, Amrit Lal Basumatary Cong(S), put a Short Notice Question regarding a dacoity that took place in the

---

64 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 610, dt. 19th April, 1988, p 30.
House of Sri Bhagaram Agarwala, a big businessman of Gossaigaon town. Ramendra Narayan Kalita (AGP) put an Unstarred question demanding information from the minister concerned about the cost of deportation of a foreigner from Assam. The minister replied that the cost was Rs. 202/-.

Abdul Jabbar (UMF) put a Starred Question to know about the annual income from the forest products of Assam. The member put another supplementary question which was not answered by the minister. The Speaker pointed out that such questions were irrelevant and unnecessary and could not be admitted.

Through questions, the members sometimes, offered constructive suggestions to the Government. Joinath Sarma (AGP) drew the attention of the Government to the problem of power generation by putting a Starred Question. The member expressed serious concern over the misappropriation of fund and the irregularities in the power sector. He also demanded high level enquiry for the same.

---

65 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SNQ 15, p 38, dt. 6 May, 1988.
66 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 233, pp 33, dt. 3 April, 1989.
67 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, p 19, dt. 5 April, 1989.
Hemen Das (CPI-M) supported the proposals moved by Joinath Sarma (AGP). A F Golam Osmani (UMF) supported the suggestions offered by the members of the ruling party so as to make the power sector a productive unit. The Speaker admitted announcement of an enquiry committee\textsuperscript{68}. Mahendra Mohan Rai Choudhury (AGP) demanded the publication of biographies of the martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of Assam Movement\textsuperscript{69}.

Certain questions were used as tactics to reflect dislike on particular minister's policy and actions and sometimes on his personality. The Opposition resorted to extensive use of question hour or of other parliamentary devices so as to harass and pressurise minister to admit his departmental inefficiency or malpractices. For example, one Opposition member seriously criticised the educational policy of the Government through personal attack. Altaf Hussain Majumdar, INC (I) criticised the education minister terming him as a 'philosopher' and alleged that the minister was

\textsuperscript{68} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 51, pp 18, dt. 9\textsuperscript{th} Oct, 1987.
\textsuperscript{69} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 169, pp 9, dt. 3\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1989.
leading the students towards catastrophe. Sometimes members from both the ruling and the Opposition benches started behaving irresponsibly to criticise and condemn each other\textsuperscript{70}.

Questions were also used as weapons for political attack or to criticise party activities. A lot of matters pertaining to party principles had a bearing on the questions. Certain questions reminded the Government to keep or fulfil the promises that were made by that party through the manifesto or other means during election time. For example, Naren Tanti (AGP) put a Starred Question to know from the minister of Assam Accord implementations, about the number of sufferers during the Assam Agitation and whether they were suitably rehabilitated or not, particularly the youths\textsuperscript{71}. The answer of the minister was unconvincing to the member. The member wanted to know the basis of issuing certificates to the sufferers. He pointed out that the district

\textsuperscript{70} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 44-47, dt. 30\textsuperscript{th} March, 1987.

\textsuperscript{71} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 176, pp 23-25, dt. 3\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1989.
administration was not competent and proper authority to issue such certificate. The member criticised the policy of the Government on that issue while emphasising the sufferings and sacrifice of the people, reminded the Government to do the needful. Debeswar Bora (AGP), wanted to know whether there was any standing executive circular regarding the appointment of the sufferers. The minister admitted that the Government was committed to appoint the sufferers on priority basis. The member also reminded the promises of the Government made through election manifesto.

The Question hour was also utilised sometimes by the members to claim certain privileges for themselves. For example, a member wanted to know from the Government whether they adopted suitable policy to allot land to the Member of Legislative Assembly, Member of Parliament and the ministers of Assam. Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF)

---

demanded that all the MLAs be provided with pool cars to visit their constituencies. Questions were basically based on respective constituencies. The members in the House were primarily interested in showing that they were vigilant enough to defend the interests of those whom they represented. Questions often focussed on individual grievances, cases of alleged injustice and the like. Questions pertaining to purely constituency oriented matters dominated the House. The following table shows the nature of questions that were asked in the Assembly to redress the grievances of the people, during our survey.

---

73 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 33, dt. 23rd March, 1990.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>No. of SQ put</th>
<th>No. of SQ relating to constituency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>No. of SQ local in Nature</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>074</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3231</strong></td>
<td><strong>2407</strong></td>
<td><strong>74%</strong></td>
<td><strong>824</strong></td>
<td><strong>25%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assam Legislative Assembly debates 1985-1990.
### Table: 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>No. of USQ put</th>
<th>No. of USQ relating to constituency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>No. of USQ local in Nature</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2804</strong></td>
<td><strong>1766</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>1035</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The subject matter of the questions reflected the range of interests of the members. Shifts on emphasis could easily be noticed in different sessions. However, majority of members in the House basically showed interests in the problems and issues of their respective constituencies. Sometimes, questions were put beyond the constituency of a member. Local and constituency related questions and those
concerning the general issues of Government were often used as a criterion for deciding their priorities.

An important aspect of the legislative role of the members in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly was that all the members never participated in asking questions. Although some of them actively participated in certain issues like cut motion, voting for demand of grant, censure motion, and adjournment motion, most of them remained indifferent to the problems of their constituencies. Their legislative and representational role seemed to confine to mere asking of a few questions in the Assembly and that too only occasionally. During the survey it was found that a few members like Sirajul Hoque Choudhury (AGP), Srimati Kumari Rabi Das INC (I), Jay Prakash Tewari(AGP), Rajen Timung INC(I), Kamakhya Charan Choudhury (AGP), Nilamani Das (AGP), Hiranya Bora INC(I), Moti Das (AGP), Harendra Bora (AGP), Abdul Hussain Sarkar (UMF), Abhijit Sarma (AGP), Keshab Ch. Gogoi INC(I), Amiya Gogoi INC(I), Atul Ch.
Koch (AGP) put only a few questions in the Assembly. A few members even never raised a single question in the Assembly. It indicated a declining role of the legislative elites. Thus all the members of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly did not participate in asking questions. Moreover the ruling party members were not persistent questioner.

However, some of the members of the both the treasury and Opposition benches were vocal in ventilating the grievances of the people, particularly of their respective constituencies. A few members of the ruling party were found seriously criticising the Government. Such members of the ruling party were able to throw light on some of the contemporary issues and problems of the state. For example, members like Joinath Sarma (AGP), Naren Tanti (AGP), Dinabandhu Choudhury (AGP), Suren Swargiary (AGP), Kamala Kalita(AGP), Kumar Dipak Das (AGP), Pradip Hazarika(AGP), Bharat Narah (AGP), and Kusumbar Gogoi (AGP) took active interest in putting questions in the

---

\(^{74}\) Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985–1990).
Assembly\textsuperscript{75}. It shows that such members never hesitated in putting questions.

It was found during the survey of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Assam Legislative Assembly, that the back-benchers did not put questions in considerable numbers. It did not mean that they had no problem in their constituencies, or grievances of the individuals close to them or complaints lodged before them orally or in writing. In fact, they did not prove to be worthy representatives. They mostly remained indifferent to the problems of their constituencies\textsuperscript{76}.

It had been clear that some members made great use of the question time while the others did not. It seemed that only a few members had properly developed the aptitude to ask questions or became specialised in asking questions. For it, some could be counted as persistent questioner. Others could go for months or even years without putting a single question on paper. There were members who took delight in

\textsuperscript{75} Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985-1990).
\textsuperscript{76} Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985-1990).
asking questions and were therefore, always, on the look out for a suitable subject to put questions. Only in exceptional circumstances or use them as a last resort.

The treasury back-benchers asked questions to let others know about their existence, since they seldom got chance to speak in the legislature. They put questions mostly to seek information. When the Opposition members harassed or embarrassed a minister in the House, the supporters of the Government unusually put supplementaries to cross-examine the minister concern instead of putting helpful supplementaries so that the minister might get relief.

Most of the questions in the Assembly were asked by the Opposition members. Besides, the Starred Questions, the Opposition made extensive use of the Unstarred Questions to redress the grievances of the people. There was a declining trend towards the Short Notice Questions. The Opposition members put maximum number of starred, Unstarred, supplementaries and Short Notice Questions in the Assembly. The Opposition capitalised on the lack of
procedural knowledge of the members of the ruling party relating to the transaction of business in the House. The legislative role of the Opposition has been clear from the following table\textsuperscript{77}.

Some Opposition members like Ramendra Dey (CPI-M), A F Golam Osmani (UMF), Abdul Muktadir Choudhury INC(I), Mosiruddin Sheikh, INC(I), Yousuf Ali Ahmed (UMF), Golok Rajbongshi INC(I), Amrit Lal Basumatary Cong. (s), Charan Narzary (PTCA), Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF), Hemen Das (CPI-M), Gopinath Das (UMF), Shanti Ranjan Dasgupta (UMF) had special knack of asking questions. They were prominent in the party as well as in the House and were fully conscious of their responsibilities\textsuperscript{78}. Most of the Opposition members were aged, experienced and former legislative elites in various capacities, who were persistent questioners in the House. They were ambitious and their knowledge of the procedure made it possible for

\textsuperscript{77} Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985–1990).

\textsuperscript{78} Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985–1990).
getting their maximum number of questions admitted in the House. The following table gives a clear picture.

A noticeable aspect of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly was that the increase in the number of the supplementaries was not only in favour of the opposition, but also the ruling party members or the government supporters. Questions had to be straightforward requests for information and actions. However, most of the questions became a means of prosecuting political arguments. As a result, the question time did not always remain chiefly a backbencher’s occasion. The leading Opposition front benchers were prompted more often to take a hand in the supplementary exchange.

The independent members were the persistent questioners in the Assembly. A few independent members like Binoy Khungur Basumatary (UTNLF), Aminul Islam (IND), Padma Nath Kairi (IND), put questions in the House on a variety of subject matters. They brought into focus a
number of issues and problems to draw the attention of the Government. Since a number of members had no procedural knowledge regarding the transaction of business in the House, most of the questions were put in overlapping manner. Sometimes supplementaries were put in response to the reply of the minister to a Starred Question, which should have been put as a separate Question. Those who were the new comers to the legislature, mostly confronted with this situation. Some of the questions were put in such a way, that the members appeared to have no procedural knowledge about the transaction of business in the House. For example, M M Choudhury of AGP asked a Starred Question demanding information from the minister about the condition of the local PHC, while the member put a supplementary to know the number of such centres established by the Local Board. The health minister replied that such supplementary should have been put as a separate 

79 Data collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly (1985-1990).
question. It appeared that some of the members were unfamiliar with the procedure of the conduct of business in the Assembly. Similarly, Girin Barua (AGP) wanted to know from the minister of Panchayat and Rural Development, about the causes for suspension of the BDO of Kathiatoli development Block\textsuperscript{81}. However, only a few members put supplementaries to separate questions. Responding to the reply given by the minister on the Starred Question, put by Girin Barua (AGP), Dilip Saikia (AGP), put a supplementary which the minister refused to answer since such question had to be put as a separate question and not as a supplementary\textsuperscript{82}. Amrit Lai Basumatary Cong.(S), asked a supplementary, which the minister refused to answer on the same ground\textsuperscript{83}. It was found out that the members put maximum number of supplementaries in order to embarrass a minister\textsuperscript{84}. Similarly, Hemen Das (CPI-M) put A supplementary Question in support of a Starred Question put by

\textsuperscript{80} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 142, pp 2, dt. 12\textsuperscript{th} March, 1987.
\textsuperscript{81} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 145, pp 8-9, dt. 12\textsuperscript{th} March, 1987.
\textsuperscript{82} ibid
\textsuperscript{83} ibid
\textsuperscript{84} ibid
Dinabandhu Choudhury (AGP), which was not properly replied by the minister on the ground that such questions should have been put as separate questions\textsuperscript{85}. Bhaben Barua (AGP) put a supplementary question in connection with a Starred Question put by Rabin Saikia (AGP) regarding the construction of building for the Public health centres, which the minister refused to answer arguing that such type of questions should be put as a separate question\textsuperscript{86}. Sometimes supplementaries were put to a minister which was the concern of other department. Responding to the answers given by the minister on flood control, Dr. A K Dey (UMF) put a Supplementary Question suggesting to the minister to construct hotels in flood affected areas. In reply, the minister said that was not the work of the Flood Control department\textsuperscript{87}. It was noteworthy that most of such supplementaries were put by the supporters of the

\textsuperscript{85} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 431, pp 15-17, dt. 1\textsuperscript{st} April, 1987.
\textsuperscript{86} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 283, pp 11, dt. 7\textsuperscript{th} April, 1988.
\textsuperscript{87} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 638, pp 4, dt. 13\textsuperscript{th} May, 1988.
government, who were new legislative elites, having little politically elite background.

The increasing volume of deferred questions was an important aspect relating to the legislative role of the legislative elites. The following table gives a picture of such trend:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>No. of deferred starred questions</th>
<th>No. of deferred unstarred question</th>
<th>No. of deferred Short notice question</th>
<th>Total no. of deferred question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assam Legislative Assembly Debates proceedings from 1986-1990;

The table shows the gradual increase in the numbers of deferred questions in the House. For example, in 1986, the
number of deferred questions was nil, while in the year 1989 and 1990, the number of such questions increased considerably.

Sometimes members expressed serious concern over the fate of the deferred questions. The Speaker too expressed concern.

Dr. Kamala Kalita (AGP): Many questions have been deferred. Then what is the use of putting questions if reply is not given.

Silvius Condopan INC(I): Many questions have been deferred.

Golok Rajbongshi INC(I): Sir, rules of questions had been changed. If the minister failed to answer the questions then what was the use of changing the rules.

Mr. Speaker: I have noticed this unfortunate affair. I will give my ruling later on. 88

On and off members were found to put questions in which supplementary feedback was not considered necessary. Such questions were put in the House demanding

88 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, pp 1, dt. 27th April, 1989.
certain kind of information. It showed that the control of the Legislature over the executive was more formal. Throughout the survey it was observed that in certain matters the members were not keen to demand more clarification from the Government. Dr. Kamala Kalita (AGP) asked a Starred Question as to know from the Government regarding the shift of West Kamrup divisional forest office to Chaygaon, in which there was no supplementary. Similarly, Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF) put a Starred Question demanding information from the Government regarding the travelling allowance of a minister, in which there was no supplementary. Swarup Upadhyay INC (I) put a Starred Question to know from the Government about the river erosion, in which there was no supplementary. Similarly on various important matters also, the members did not put supplementaries.

Another tendency seemed to be fairly prevalent in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly i.e. answers to the questions

---

89 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, dt. 19th Dec, 1986, p 3.
90 ibid
91 ibid
were not prepared in time. Members mostly complained that the questions had been asked in the previous session and yet no reply was ready. The ministers had no effective control on the civil service. Amrit Lal Basumatary Cong (S), put a Starred Question demanding information from the Revenue Minister regarding the number of landless agriculturists’ families in Assam. The minister said that the particulars and facts were not readily available with the Government. The Deputy Commissioner had already been asked to furnish such particulars and figures. Similarly Mithius Tudu INC (I), wanted to know from the Government regarding the date and year of construction of the Santhal Colony Tribal block in Gassaigaon Revenue Circle. The minister replied that the particulars and figures in that regard had not yet been received from the district authority. Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF), put a Starred Question so as to know from the minister regarding evacuees* property in Assam. The minister told that due to lack of information, the exact figure


regarding evacuees property could not be furnished district wise. The Opposition criticised the Government for having little idea on the evacuees property. Dipak Das (AGP), put a Starred Question to know from the minister regarding about an appointment in the department of Education. The minister told that the materials and particulars were not readily available due to non-supply of such records by district authority.

Sometimes members complained that there was deliberate delay in replying to the questions. As a result, there were huge arrears of questions with a few departments. For example, most of the questions relating to the department of education could not be answered by the minister either due to non-availability or non-supply of particulars by the authority concerned. On 25th April, 1989, the minister for education said that answer to the Starred Question no. 349 was not ready.

95 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 43, dt. 21st March, 1989, p 5.
**Abdul Jalil Ragibi (UMF):** Will the minister of education be pleased to state?

(a) Whether the head master of Nilbagan Madrassa in the Hojai sub-division named Md. Manir Ali Barlaskar is absent for a long time from his duty?

(b) What actions have been taken in this regard?

**Jatin Mali (AGP), (Minister of Education):** Particulars and information have not yet been received from concerned district authority.

**Abdul Jalil Ragibi (UMF):** This question has been repeatedly asked for three times in different sessions, yet the minister has failed to answer. How much time is required to receive information from Hojai?

**Jatin Mali (AGP):** The question will be replied in the current session\(^\text{96}\).  

Similarly, on 3\(^{rd}\) April, 1990 the reply to Unstarred Question 320 was not ready as shown below -

**Ref: Supply of Hindi and Bengali Textbooks.**

\(^{96}\text{Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 349, pp 7, dt. 25\(^{th}\) April, 1989.} \)**
**Sri Shio Sambhu Ojah, INC (I):** Will the Education Minister be pleased to state –

(a) What steps are taken up for the supply of text books in the Hindi and Bengali medium schools of Assam?

(b) How much amount is earmarked for this purpose?

Brindaban Goswami, (AGP) (Minister): The Government has not yet received information and facts in this regard from concerned authority.

The following table presents a picture regarding the failure of the Government to clarify its stand on matters relating to the Education Dept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Year</th>
<th>Starred Question</th>
<th>Unstarred Question</th>
<th>Short Notice Question</th>
<th>Total No. of unanswered questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table: 3.6**

Source: Data prepared from the Proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly Debate (1990).

---

97 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, USQ 320, pp 49, dt. 3rd April, 1990.
Sometimes very few supplementaries were asked and most of them were barely in question from. In the British House of Commons a supplementary containing 151 words was asked and the answer was given in 124 words. Most of them were complicated and argumentative and were indeed a series of questions. Many were stimulated more by the subject than by the precise wording of the minister’s reply. Some were provocative too having lingering tendency. For example, Jagat Hazarika (AGP) put a Starred Question to know from the Health minister whether the mental hospital at Tezpur was a mental hospital or not. Dr. A K Dey (UMF) put a few supplementaries which was provocative in nature, to which the minister replied in usual form. Ratneswar Sarkar (UMF) put a Starred Question to clarify the position of the Government in regard to the selection of SC/ST non-Government members in the sub-divisional SC/ST Development Board. The members put a number of supplementaries generating argument and counter

---

98 Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 152, pp 25, dt. 16th March, 1990

210
arguments between the ruling party and Opposition bench\textsuperscript{99}. On another occasion, the House witnessed uproar over the matter of land allotment to the refugees in Nagaon district\textsuperscript{100}. The matter was raised in the House through a Starred Question by Dr. Ardhendu Kr. Dey (UMF) regarding the allotment of land to the refugees from East Pakistan. Most of the supplementaries put in this regard were found to be provocative\textsuperscript{101}.

A large number of questions was rejected by the Chair. A few members of long parliamentary experience also committed blunders and did not find themselves well-versed in the procedures for framing the questions. The ingenuity of a member was tested when he drafted a question in a manner so as to permit the executive, the least scope for elucidation. Likewise, putting of right type of supplementary put to test the parliamentary acumen of the members. The following table shows the number of questions disallowed or rejected

\textsuperscript{99} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 9, pp 22, dt. 9\textsuperscript{th} Nov, 1988.
\textsuperscript{100} Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, SQ 326, pp 13, dt. 29\textsuperscript{th} March, 1990.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid
by the Speaker on various grounds, particularly for the lack of procedural knowledge as well as for the inability to weed out unimportant questions, which were responsible for the rejection of a number of questions. They did not show parliamentary acumen.

Table:- 3.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/ Year</th>
<th>SQ</th>
<th>USQ</th>
<th>SNQ</th>
<th>Total No of disallowed question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collected from the proceedings of Assam Legislative Assembly, 1985-90.
Thus the members in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly had been making extensive use of questions. We present below a table showing the number of questions asked in different sessions of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly.

Table:- 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/ Year</th>
<th>SQ</th>
<th>USQ</th>
<th>SNQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabled</td>
<td>Admitted/ Answered</td>
<td>Tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3231</td>
<td>2417</td>
<td>2804</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: - Assam Legislative Assembly debate 1985-1990.

The number of admitted questions was quite high in case of Unstarred Questions. This shows that the Assembly
was liberal enough to admit Unstarred Questions. This was due to the fact that sufficient time was available to answer and the members usually asked for detailed information. Moreover, procedural rules were not as rigid as in the case of the Starred questions.

A perusal of the working of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly during the question hour shows that most of the members were interested in articulating the matter of constituency importance. They generally used the question hour to acquaint the Government with the problems of their respective constituencies.

On the whole the question hour of the Assam Legislative Assembly tried to serve the purpose for which it was meant. The question hour played a vital role in focussing the public grievances. When burning problems arose, people used to rush to the members of the Assembly to request them to press the Government during the question hour for solution\textsuperscript{102}. The members of 8th Assam Legislative Assembly,

Assembly were by and large successful in highlighting various issues and problems concerning the people.

A survey of the legislative role of the legislative elites in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly showed that most of them lacked procedural knowledge, in the conduct of transaction of business. Majority of them were however, unfamiliar with the procedures. Absence of knowledge restricted the scope of the legislators in properly focussing the problems and issues of the people.

The content analysis of the questions revealed certain important facts. Some members made very little or no use at all of their right to put questions. A few members never participated in asking questions. It appeared that only a few members properly developed the aptitude to ask questions or specialised in asking questions. Most of them were members of the Opposition parties.

The survey of the legislative role of the members in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly shows that the Assembly has served the purpose for which questions were
put on the floor of the House. The balance shifted from one to another. From the first session to the last session, covering altogether twelve sessions, various factors combined as per the rules of the House. Sometimes, interest of the members changed due to change of political affiliation*, sometimes social, economic and political situations affected the questions. Professional background, personal likes and dislikes, mood, and general attitude towards particular problems left a deep impact on their questions.

**************